

**MINUTES**  
**UNITED TENNESSEE VETERANS ASSOCIATION (UTVA)**  
**September 4, 2012**

**REPRESENTATIVES / SPEAKERS PRESENT**

John Bradley, Social Worker, Nashville Vet Center  
Elizabeth Swope, PTSD Coordinator, TVHS PTSD Clinic  
Travis Kraft, Associate Director, VA Regional Office, Nashville  
Jimmy McGlawn, Assistant Director, VA Memphis Medical Center  
Bill Burleigh, Executive Director, Operation Stand Down Nashville, Inc.

**UTVA MEMBERS PRESENT**

Fred Poe: Air Force Sergeants Association  
Diane Poe: Air Force Sergeants Association Auxiliary  
Mary Lee Fielder: American Ex-Prisoners of War  
George Martin: AMVETS  
Frank Forbes: Disabled American Veterans  
Bill Crawford and Curtis Hudson: Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Ralph Land and Barry Rice: Vietnam Veterans of America  
Mary Ross: Women Veterans of America  
Harriett Howard and Dorothy Carter: WAVES

**TDVA STAFF PRESENT**

Many-Bears Grinder, Commissioner  
Wendell Cheek, Deputy Commissioner  
Yvette Martinez, Assistant Commissioner of Outreach and Communications  
Roger Harrell, Director of Claims

Julie Cyr, Legislative Liaison

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Commissioner Grinder called the meeting to order at 1:05pm.

### **PROCEEDINGS**

Commissioner Grinder completed roll call of all organizations present. She explained to the members present the organizations that have been put on Inactive status and how these organizations can go about becoming a member again. She called on Mary Ross to give the invocation and Mary Lee Fielder to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Grinder asked for approval of minutes from the last UTVA meeting on June 5, 2012. Bill Crawford made a motion to approve the minutes and Ralph Land seconded the motion. The vote to approve minutes was unanimous.

### **BRIEFINGS**

**Music Video on PTSD:** PTSD Won't Stop Me: By the Nashville Film Institute. Commissioner Grinder explained that this video was created at the Bicentennial Mall on the day the Wounded Warriors were recognized at the capitol.

**Nashville Vet Center** – Commissioner Grinder called on John Bradley, a social worker with the Nashville Vet Center to give a briefing on PTSD. There are Vet Centers in Nashville, Chattanooga, Memphis and Johnson City. Please see attached presentation.

Questions:

Bill Crawford, VFW: Are the reviews that you as an organization give for Veterans used as proof for a disability claim even though they are not done by doctors? Mr. Bradley stated: These reviews are taken in for consideration by ratings boards. They do quite a few treatment summaries for Veterans and it is one thing they take seriously because most of the employees at the Vet Center are Veterans themselves.

**Not Alone:** Mike Jones wasn't able to present due to a family emergency.

**TVHS PTSD Clinic:** Commissioner Grinder called on Elizabeth Swope, Interim PTSD Coordinator with the TVHS PTSD Clinic to give a brief on PTSD. In TVHS PTSD Clinic we have patients in the middle TN Region, Kentucky and as far east as Chattanooga. In 2011 there were 4,997 encounters for PTSD and that included our 697 patients seen throughout the hospital. PTSD is a clinically significant condition with symptoms that continue from one month after trauma. These symptoms cause significant distress and impairment in social, occupational, and other areas of functioning. Most of the patients we see at the VA have chronic PTSD with the symptoms lasting longer than 3 months after the traumatic event. PTSD can occur alone or can have a co-occurring problem such as interpersonal, sleep, psychiatric disorders, substance abuse and others. Evidence has shown that being able to diagnosis PTSD early can help shorten the suffering of functional impairment. That is the focus of the VA to get these patients into treatment quickly. If a patient is diagnosed in the hospital by a psychiatrist as having PTSD but continues to impair functionality then these patients would be referred to our clinic for treatment. These are patients with complicated PTSD. They may have conditions such as high potential for danger, maladaptive ways of coping, deterioration in functioning and emotional support. We work closely with the other services so these patients receive the treatment they need. Once patients are entered into our clinic they are screened, then go through a PTSD 101 which is a 3 series education classes on the disorder. Once they have completed the initial course then they see one of the clinic's staff. We have 2 psychologists who will work with patients and families to come up with a treatment plan. Currently right now we are offering evidence based treatments. Over the last 10-15 years they have moved from using mainly SSRI's to now using trauma exposure therapy in order to change the patient's cognitive thinking towards that event and improve their coping. We have a clinic in Murfreesboro and Nashville as well as we are starting to use tela-health in the CBOC's in Clarksville and Chattanooga. One of our limitations is that we do not have any Veterans; this causes us to not have any who has experienced combat which is a goal for us to work toward. We have put in a proposal to the VISN to open a 90 day residential PTSD substance abuse treatment program at the Alvin C. York Campus in Murfreesboro to house 36 beds. We feel there is a tremendous need for this program within the middle TN area.

Questions:

Ralph Land, VVA: Do we still have the 8 week residential courses that people can go stay at a facility?

Mrs. Swope stated that we don't have that in TN Valley. We had a substance abuse program that had a few beds but they have closed that due to safety concerns.

Ralph Land, VVA: Can Veterans come in and see you on a walk in basis? Mrs. Swope stated that the VA Hospital has a 24hr Mental Health walk in clinic and on the weekends it is in the emergency room.

Mary Ross, WVA: Do you have a date for when they are looking to put the residential program in Murfreesboro? How many women beds are there? Mrs. Swope stated that we don't have a date yet but we will have a six bed wing for females which will have 24hr staffing.

Barry Rice, VVA: Do you have a way to coordinate to get patient information if you have someone from out of state? Mrs. Swope stated that we currently have remote data which allows us to see their treatments from any VA medical facility.

Frank Forbes, DAV: How many in patients do you have? Mrs. Swope stated currently I do not know, I did look at a sample of patients who have had a PTSD diagnosis for over the year of 2011 and I would say about 50% of the sample I looked at would have been appropriate for a residential program.

**VA Medical Center, Memphis** – Commissioner Grinder called on Jimmy McGlawn, Assistant Director from Memphis VA Medical facility to give their report. Dr. Robinson recently took a job as a CEO with Methodist Hospital South. In the interim Dr. Sherry Knight from VISN 9 will be the acting Director until we can recruit someone. Please see attached report for information.

**VA Regional Office, Nashville** – Commissioner Grinder introduced Edna McDonald, Director of the VA Regional Facility. Ms. McDonald: reported here July 30<sup>th</sup> so I have barely over a month on the job. A few things to point out in the Biography she just read is that I came up through the ranks, served in a couple other division and time in now what is called the Veteran Service Center working claims allowing me to know what is involved in that type of work. The other thing I feel is important is the word "quality". It is one of the areas I have focused on to help the VBA to improve the accuracy of the claims that we process. I am a firm believer that accuracy and

quality will get you production not the other way around. I am happy to now be a part of the Nashville Team. I am happy to know that we are leading the way, just this month we completed 128 claims; the second highest in their history. They have done all of this while remaining at a 90% accuracy and above which is one of the highest of our stations nationally. One area I was very involved in before I came to Nashville was processing claims for military sexual trauma (MST). I did a random sample study to see why claims were denied and I saw that there are areas that need improvement. I found we were not following our own guide lines as well as we thought we were. I also spoke with local Veterans Organizations to see what is the main area of concern within the regional office. Many groups stated that it was taking too long to get dependents or spouses added, and the entire claims process so we are going to tackle that. One thing you should know about me is that I am dedicated to customer service. I have heard that Nashville has been doing a good job within that area and I believe that each representative needs to think of themselves as a customer service representative to provide the best care we can to our Veterans.

Angela Jaquist, Service Center Manager: A few updates from the service center one of the things affecting us locally is the quest for 1 million veterans served this year nationally. The Nashville piece of the pie is to have completed 30,000 claims by the end of this year. This is very doable at this point; in this fiscal year to date we have done over 28,000 rating decisions. With that we cannot forget about quality. Our 12 month rating accuracy has been 91% with our authorization at 97%. We do have areas to grow in but we are currently working on that. We formed a quality review team to give another set of eyes looking at cases prior to leaving. The Secretary's goal by 2015 is to have all claims completed in 125 days. Currently Nashville has 36.91% over the 125 day mark. Nationally it is 66.6% so we are less than the National number but still need improvements. Our average days to complete claims are 99 and our target is 95 so we are getting close there. Our Homeless Claims we are specifically targeting them. Those that don't meet the specific criteria of homeless we still keep on hardship because they need to be expedited. As far as our rating bundle claims the average days pending right now are 121 days at the Nashville office and nationally we are at 232 days. Our biggest problem is the awaiting evidence phase. The time from when a letter is sent asking for more evidence and the time we receive the evidence. The average right now is 108 days. Having fully developed claims can really

help with this process. Currently on appeals we are currently at 266 days for our NOD's which is high because the national target is 182. Those incoming NOD's is causing us to not get caught up with that number. Nationally there was an appeals re-design team to see what can be done. We hired 4 additional file clerks and added 12 more rating specialists to increase our capacity.

Questions:

Bill Crawford, VFW: How is the Veterans Benefit Management system going to affect us in Nashville and what will you be doing about the appeal rating? Edna McDonald stated that just coming from the other end I had a lot of subject matter experts from compensation service who were working directly with the programmers. I will tell you we had multiple meetings with National VSO's to start the gateway for all service officers to get in and submit claims. How quickly this will happen we are not sure. Stakeholder enterprise portal was on track last I knew to be rolled out in 2013. Appeals is still an area that we are not where we need to be, Nashville is better than most by far but we are not hitting targets.

Mary Ross, WVA: Will we be getting a Women Veterans Coordinator in the Regional Office? Edna McDonald Stated not per say but I do not General Hickey's promise to get that started and we will look at the numbers to see how close we are.

Bill Crawford, VFW: Is the VA working to hire Veterans? When you work on overtime do you have a percentage of claims you are trying to reach? Angela Jaquist stated that we did hire all Veterans. We do set targets each week it just depends on where we stand for that week.

Ralph Land, VVA: will TBI and PTSD be two separate disabilities in a rating or one? Angela Janquist stated it will depend on what they find and what the symptoms are for each Veteran.

Trina Hyde, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Officer: We have 23 staff and 4 offices in Memphis, Nashville, Knoxville and Clarksville. We are currently in the process of hiring 4 additional staff within the next 2 months. We have implemented 2 new initiatives this year one

at Fort Campbell called the integrative disability evaluation system and on the MTSU campus the Vet Success on Campus initiative. Fort Campbell has 2 VRC's assigned and is currently looking to hire 1 more. This way as soon as a service member gets referred to the medical evaluation board they are automatically entitled to chapter 31. This is allowing for the process to begin much earlier than when they had to wait on their final rating decision. We are working very closely with the Warrior Transition Unit to see what we can improve on. Vet Success has one person stationed on the campus to work with Chapter 31 Veterans but currently she is working with all Veterans on the campus. She is there to ensure the Veterans know what is available for them. In addition to the initiative at Fort Campbell we also have a Coming Home to Work Program. His job is to provide realistic suitable career counseling with the service member assigned to the Warrior Transition Unit. We are looking to combine the 2 programs to expand our presence on Fort Campbell. Since October 2011 we have received over 1700 applications for Chapter 31. We provide 2,500 independent living services in TN. Currently we are meeting all of our accuracy goals on a National level. Our timelessness target is 45 days and we are meeting that at 43 days from application submission to enrollment.

**Operation Stand Down Nashville, Inc.:** Commissioner Grinder introduced Bill Burleigh, Executive Director, OSDN. Please see attached report for information.

### **TDVA Business**

**Commissioner Grinder** stated that all of our UTVA meetings are being video streamed and archived indefinitely. On our website we have our own UTVA section, which will have a lot of very useful information for you and your members. We have started the new meeting policy and hope to have different topics throughout the year (see attached forms). Our strategic plan for the next five years for all Veterans to have access to Veterans assistance, we are looking at growing a training division, request 2 new additional cemeteries between Nashville and Memphis and Nashville and Knoxville. One of our goals is to greatly increase fully developed claims. We are going to improve everything that is within our control, and to guide those veterans. We are conducting one-on-one county leader briefings to get all counties to resource a CSO or to stand up a service officer section. Another area we have really started to focus on is an information

campaign regarding the companies who are taking advantage of veterans. These Companies are not doing anything illegal but it is crossing a line. We have started a media release on this to make people aware (please see fact sheet attached). Governor Haslam has just signed Executive Order 15 to set up the Governor's Council on Armed Forces, Veterans and Family members. Deputy Commissioner Wendell Cheek will be leading these meetings and the first one will start in October. Women Veterans Summit is April 13-14, 2013 (please see details on our website [www.tn.gov/veteran](http://www.tn.gov/veteran)).

**Wendell Cheek, Deputy Commissioner:** We currently have submitted for Operation and Maintenance grants for middle, west and east TN State Veterans Cemeteries to finalize the raising, realigning, and cleaning of their headstones. We also have 3 expansion grants we are applying for to add irrigation, Crypts, Columbariums and Kiosks to all Cemeteries. The Jackson Cemetery Grant is currently applied for but on hold and waiting for land.

**Roger Harrell, Director of Claims TDVA:** The claims division for 2012 did 89 local hearings with 173 issues, 216 videos with 650 issues, and we have 8 video hearings scheduled for September due to our annual SOTS training. We had 270 travel board hearings with 661 issues. For FY13 we will only have 3 travel boards in November 2012, March 2013 and August 2013.

### **VETERANS ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS**

Commissioner Grinder called on each Veteran Organization for reports. (See attached reports on Disabled American Veterans, Women Veterans of America, and WAVES National.)

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

No unfinished business.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

No new business.



### **NEXT MEETINGS**

December 4, 2012 and March 5, 2013

### **ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by William Crawford to adjourn and was seconded by Mary Lee Fielder. Motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:00 p.m.

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Many-Bears Grinder, Executive Officer  
United Tennessee Veterans Association

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Date